

Thomas Jefferson to Wilson Cary Nicholas, March 24, 1806, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO WILSON CARY NICHOLAS J. MSS. (*Confidential.*)

Washington, Mar. 24, 1806.

Dear Sir, —A last effort at friendly settlement with Spain is proposed to be made at Paris, and under the auspices of France. For this purpose, Genl Armstrong & Mr. Bowdoin (both now at Paris) have been appointed joint comrs; but such a cloud of dissatisfaction rests on Genl Armstrong in the minds of many persons, on account of a late occurrence stated in all the public papers, that we have in contemplation to add a 3d commissioner, in order to give the necessary measure of public confidence to the commission. Of these two gentlemen, one being of Massachusetts & one of N. York, it is thought the 3d should be a Southern man; & the rather, as the interests to be negociated are almost entirely Southern & Western. This addition is not yet ultimately decided on; but I am inclined to believe it will be adopted. Under this expectation, & my wish that you may be willing to undertake it, I give you the earliest possible intimation of it, that you may be preparing both your mind & your measures for the mission. The departure would be required to be very prompt; tho' the absence I think will not be long, Bonaparte not being in the practice of procrastination. This particular considern will, I hope, reconcile the voyage to your affairs & your feelings. The allowance to an extra mission, is salary from the day of leaving home, & expenses to the place of destination, or in lieu of the latter, & to avoid settlements, a competent fixed sum may be given. For the return, a continuance of the salary for three months after fulfilment of the commission. Be so good as to make up your mind as quickly as possible,

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& to answer me as early as possible. Consider the measure as proposed provisionally only, & not to be communicated to any mortal until we see it proper.

Affectionate salutations.¹

¹ On this subject, Jefferson wrote further to Nicholas:

“ Washington, Apr. 13, 06.

“ Dear Sir,—The situation of your affairs certainly furnishes good cause for your not acceding to my proposition of a special mission to Europe. My only hope had been, that they could have gone on one summer without you. An unjust hostility against Genl Armstrong will, I am afraid, shew itself whenever any treaty made by him shall be offered for ratification. I wished, therefore, to provide against this, by joining a person who would have united the confidence of the whole Senate. Genl Smith was so prominent in the opposition to Armstrong, that it would be impossible for them to act together. We conclude, therefore, to leave the matter with Armstrong & Bowdoin. Indeed, my dear Sir, I wish sincerely you were back in the Senate; & that you would take the necessary measures to get yourself there. Perhaps, as a preliminary, you should go to our Legislature. Giles' absence has been a most serious misfortune. A majority of the Senate means well. But Tracy & Bayard are too dexterous for them & have very much influenced their proceedings. Tracy has been of nearly every committee during the session, & for the most part the chairman, & of course drawer of the reports. 7. federalists voting always in phalanx, and joined by some discontented republicans, some oblique ones, some capricious, have so often made a majority as to produce very serious embarrassment to the public operations, and very much do I dread the submitting to them, at the next session, any treaty which can be made with either England or Spain, when I consider that 5. joining the federalists, can defeat a friendly settlement of our affairs. The H of R is as well disposed as I ever saw one. The defection of so prominent a leader, threw them into dismay & confusion for a moment; but they soon rallied to their own principles, & let him

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go off with 5. or 6, followers only. One half of these are from Virginia. His late declaration of perpetual opposition to this administration, drew off a few others who at first had joined him, supposing his opposition occasional only, & not systematic. The alarm the House has had from this schism, has produced a rallying together & a harmony, which carelessness & security had begun to endanger. On the whole, this little trial of the firmness of our representatives in their principles, & that of the people also, which is declaring itself in support of their public functionaries, has added much to my confidence in the stability of our government; and to my conviction, that, should things go wrong at any time, the people will set them to rights by the peaceable exercise of their elective rights. To explain to you the character of this schism, its objects and combinations, can only be done in conversation; & must be deferred till I see you at Monticello, where I shall probably be about the 10th or 12th of May, to pass the rest of the month there. Congress has agreed to rise on Monday, the 21st.

“Accept my affectionate salutations.”